

Revolution '67

NJCU Screens Local Filmmaker's Documentary

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Monday, November 16 - students arrived on the fourth floor of the Karnoutsos building this evening to attend a special screening of Revolution '67, a film that documents the 1967 Newark Riots.

For many New Jerseyans, particularly those generations born in the years following the five days that brought the city to the boiling point, the 1967 riots are an enigma; an episode in the state's history spoken of in hushed tones, if at all.

Interspersed among the archival footage of the era, the film explores the subject of the riots through interviews with local historians and key figures who were present during the riots. Among those figures were political activists Tom Hayden and Carol Glassman, historian and former National Guardsman Paul Zigo who served in Newark during the riots, former Newark Mayor Sharpe James, and The New York Times' Bob Herbert, among others.

Together they bore testimony to the tensions and frustrations of a 1960s Newark divided by the racial pressures of the era.

Indeed, before the riots took place racial tensions had already been running high in a city known for its corrupt government, run by then Mayor Hugh J. Addonizio.

Addonizio and his administration were responsible for numerous public projects like the UMDNJ that displaced thousands of black and other minority residents at the time. This, coupled with years of neglect of black residents, culminated when Addonizio appointed a white man to the Board of Education; the appointee, who lacked a college degree, was picked over a man who would be the state's first black certified public accountant.

These incidents alone did not result in the riot, but were merely a pretext to them.

It would not be until mid-July, when John Smith - a black taxicab driver - was stopped by Newark police for a traffic violation.

Rumors spread quickly that he had been beaten to death. (In fact, he was still alive and taken to a local hospital for minor injuries.)



Donated to Revolution '67 by Corbis-Bettmann
African-Americans jeering at National Guardsmen

The rumors took on a life of their own, however, and spread among the city's black residents fed up with their mistreatment at the hands of Newark's authorities.

For five days the city was gripped by rioting and violence that claimed 26 lives, injured hundreds and caused millions of dollars of property damage.

During the riots, the National Guard was called in to quell the violence and enforce martial law, effectively turning the city into a war zone here at home, at a time when the Vietnam War was raging overseas.

One of the film's objectives was to dispel some of the myths and misconceptions surrounding the riots, among them, that the Newark riots were responsible for "white flight" - the term used to refer to the exodus of working and middle-class whites from Newark into the suburbs - a claim that the film shows as false.

The film argues that a federal loan program aimed at providing low interest-rate mortgages, which at the time were available only to whites, started the exodus decades prior to the riots.

As these residents left, Newark became more balkanized and the poor and the working-class minority residents were left with fewer jobs and opportunities, which - in the aftermath of the riots - would be one of the underlying causes highlighted in a Senate report which studied the riots.

At the conclusion of the screening, the filmmakers behind Revolution '67 - New Jersey residents Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and her husband Jerome Bongiorno took questions from the students in the audience.

The questions ranged in topic, dealing both with the film and current conditions such as crime and poverty in Newark and the surrounding areas.

The event was co-sponsored by the History and Sociology club and hosted by Dr. Timothy White, Assistant Professor of History and joined by Dr. Max Herman, Professor of Sociology and historian who has collected oral histories on the Newark riots.

Be sure to check out the documentary's website (http://www.bongiornoproductions.com/REVOLUTION_67) for more information on the film and the Newark Riots.